Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties in Non-Indian Communities

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Archeologists have debated long and heatedly over the definition of cultural properties, the concept of significance, and the application of National Register criteria to our diverse resource base throughout the developmental and administrative history of cultural resources management. With the Antiquities Act of 1906, the United States Congress ventured a first definition of cultural property. It defined such property in terms of material remains, principally features and artifacts as seen by archeologists. Subsequent statutes, such as the Historic Sites Act of 1935 and the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, followed this line.

Recently, however, perhaps as a result of the insight gained from generations of ethnographic studies, and undoubtedly owing also to the civil rights movement that transformed American historical thought in the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government arrived at the realization that cultural properties reflect living cultures as well as dead ones and express systems of belief. This is something that anthropologists had known for a hundred years, but then law always lags behind social science. The government also belatedly grasped that some cultural properties are not readily observable until the observer gains some understanding of the system of belief behind the site. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 tried to straddle the gap between property and process. More recently, the National Register of Historic Places produced Bulletin 38 to provide guidance on the identification of traditional cultural properties.

Blessing of the waters in the *acequia,* or irrigation ditch, that serves the communities of La Joya and Contreras, NM. Photo by Nancy Hunter Warren.

Federal agencies and state historic preservation programs are now instructed to take traditional cultural properties into account when examining the effects of federal undertakings. The need to identify and document traditional cultural properties prior to federal undertakings raises questions about the documentation process in culturally diverse communities throughout the United States that federal agencies and others involved in cultural resource management need to consider. For example, do the communities in a particular study area have traditions that meet the threshold of eligibility envisioned by the traditional cultural property process?[1] How are traditional cultural properties defined in communities where there may be many traditions but no single cultural or religious tradition?

If a traditional cultural property is as intangible as an open space or a mountaintop devoid of features and artifacts in the conventional archeological sense, how can it be identified? How do you identify the people who have the cultural knowledge and community sanction to speak about the significance of the property? Last, and perhaps most important, what do traditional communities risk and gain when they identify traditional cultural properties for outsiders?

These are at least some of the questions that cultural resource managers must address in identifying traditional cultural properties of concern to a broad range of traditional communities. We will address many of these questions below, with an emphasis on working with local sources in the documentation of traditional cultural properties. We will make suggestions for (1) defining the physical and social boundaries of communities; (2) for documenting traditional practices; and (3) for interviewing community members.

We use the term traditional cultural property here consistent with the guidance in National Register Bulletin No. 38. The Bulletin describes a traditional cultural property as a historic property whose significance derives from the role the property plays in a community's historically rooted beliefs, customs and practices.[2] Traditional cultural properties become eligible for inclusion in the National Register because of their association with the cultural practices or beliefs of a living community. While they are eligible because of the historical depth of the practice, they are also important in the continuing cultural identity of the community.

Traditional cultural properties are defined in a historical context that is significant to cultural resource specialists. To traditional communities, however, cultural survival and cultural revitalization are contemporary social issues.[3] For researchers, documenting traditional cultural properties requires insight into the cultural and temporal contexts within which properties have significance to the community.

Establishing the length of time a community has practiced a particular ritual or custom is largely a matter of historical or ethnohistorical research. For some traditional practices, particularly those that involve public demonstrations such as processions, ritual dances, performances, or other events, documentation may exist in earlier anthropological or sociological studies of the community. There may even be photographic documen-

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tation that helps to establish the time depth associated with a traditional cultural property.

Based on our experiences in New Mexico communities, it is best to demonstrate the persistence of a community tradition through a multidisciplinary approach integrating ethnography, ethnohistory, folklore and archeology. Oral accounts by participants are often useful in showing the continuity of a cultural practice, but rarely provide specific dates for the inception of a cultural tradition. The National Register guidance anticipates that it may be difficult to establish with certainty when a traditional practice originated, and permits some flexibility in applying the standard 50-year rule of eligibility.[4]

Establishing the significance of the practice to the community can be more problematical. The significance to the participants in a ritual may vary from individual to individual and from time to time. The significance of the practice and the importance of a particular place in the ritual may change in response to how the community perceives the social costs and benefits of sharing its cultural practices with others. It is important to remember that traditions are not fixed social forms. Traditions are part of an interpretive process in which present events are filtered through a learned body of customs and beliefs.[5] Traditions die; traditions are revitalized; traditions are modified to meet the social needs of traditional communities. The maintenance of traditional cultures involves a tremendous balancing of conventional conformity with a range of innovations introduced from within and from outside the community.[6] In the course of field work in traditional communities, can expect to observe the balancing process. Disclosing knowledge about a traditional cultural property is, in itself, a cultural innovation for many communities.

Image of the patron saint of farmers, San Isidro Labrador, on a tree in a corn field at La Manga, NM. Photo by Nancy Hunter Warren.

With these questions and cautions as background we want to proceed to a discussion of field methods that can help in documenting traditional cultural properties through local resources. The examples we use are taken from our own fieldwork in the Indo-Hispanic[7] communities of New Mexico. Some specific examples of our research methods are taken from a project that Dr. Levine is now directing under contract to the National Park Service.

The Office of American Indian Programs of the National Park Service, Southwest Regional Office awarded a contract to Dr. Levine, Ms. Marilyn Norcini, and Dr. Morris Foster to conduct consultations with American Indian and Hispanic communities concerning traditional uses of lands now contained in the more than 5,000 acres of Pecos National Historical Park. Pecos NHP is located in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northeastern New Mexico. Dr. Levine is working with the Hispanic communities in the Pecos Valley in the immediate vicinity of the park. The Hispanic communities have traditional ties to the church at ruined pueblo of Pecos within the park, where they hold a feast honoring the patroness of the church each summer. Ms. Norcini, a cultural anthropologist, is conducting interviews with Jemez Pueblo members whose ancestors emigrated from Pecos in the 19th century. She is also conducting interviews at other pueblos and with the Jicarilla Apache Tribe. Dr. Foster has been hired to conduct interviews in the Comanche and Apache communities of Oklahoma, with whom, documentary sources tell us, the people of Pecos Pueblo maintained an active trading relationship. This work is part of the on-going preparation of a General Management Plan that will guide park management and public interpretation for the next 10 to 15 years.

The team is interviewing American Indian and Hispanic informants who have traditional associations with the lands that are now in the park; we hope to elicit information about the customary and traditional uses of natural and cultural resources identified in the park. This information can then be used by park staff to ensure the protection of places and resources of significance to the American Indian and Hispanic communities with traditional ties to the park. We also propose to outline a consultation procedure for the park staff to follow in future contacts with the traditional communities.

Defining the Community

The first step in documenting traditional cultural properties is to define the communities and the community traditions that are associated with the properties. This is done through literature search, by a reconnaissance of the project area, and through consultation with community representatives. A community can be described by political boundaries, by physical properties, and by distinctive cultural practices, or ethnic criteria.

In New Mexico there are many traditional non-Indian communities that are defined by political, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. Land ownership often serves as a basis for identifying traditional communities in New Mexico, where land grants titled in the 17th and 18th centuries continue to preserve traditional land-use and settlement practices.[8] In other cases, traditional cultural properties might be important to many people who do not share a home community. The shrine at Chimayo is such a place. Pilgrims walk from all over the Southwest to this sacred place during Easter week. Traditional cultural property research, then, might focus first on a community, or more specifically on a particular site, depending on how much you already know about the traditions of the community.

We use a number of mapping and diagramming techniques to define the boundaries and social organization of the community or group for whom a site is significant. Mapping is important for recording observations about the political, geographical, and symbolic relationships visible in the cultural landscapes of communities.[9] Maps and visual records can be useful in interviews, although in some cases drawing or photographing the community or locating traditional cultural properties on a map gives

offense. In these cases, maps might be part of your field-notes, but might not be incorporated into a final report. Be aware of community views on these matters.

We have found that aerial photographs are particularly useful as base maps for communities. They can often be copied at planning departments of municipal offices, at state highway departments, and at federal offices such as the Soil Conservation Service or other federal planning and conservation agencies. Overlays can be used to record the various classes of information that assist in defining the community context of a traditional cultural property. Overlay maps can be used to locate public spaces such as schools and service centers, sacred spaces such as cemeteries and churches, and social spaces such as plazas, all of which are important in knowing the community where you are working.

In addition to defining community space and boundaries, it is important to have some idea of the formal contexts and informal associations that constitute the social organization of a community. Local newspapers, church and social organization news bulletins, notices posted in public spaces, such as the public library or the post office, can help to identify the social organization and the traditions of a community. Look for information about scheduled celebrations and for reports of more spontaneous events, as well as for the names of people who might serve as community consultants.

Identifying the Traditions

The Southwest has so many feast days that its notable dates are days when nothing in particular is going on. [Erna Ferguson 1940:340-341 as quoted in Weigle and White 1988:363.]

When you enter a traditional community it is important to have some understanding of the annual or seasonal round that serves as the basis for scheduling events in the community. In some communities economic activities are the basis of the annual round. In other communities religious or ritual events set the cycle of activities. We use cultural modeling techniques[10] to prepare schematics of annual cultural events in communities. These may indicate when traditional cultural properties are used.

In New Mexico, traditional observances are tied to the ceremonial calendar of the Catholic church and to the agricultural economy of the region. The Catholic ritual calendar, for example, lists some 58 feast days in honor of saints that are observed in New Mexico villages.[11] The village church is usually named after the village's patron saint, and this will serve as one indication as to which feast days are observed in a particular community.

Figure 1 was drawn on the basis of an annual cultural calendar that we assembled for New Mexico traditional communities. It was compiled from a number of publications and primary sources, including the Catholic outreach service calendar, a list of saints' days and feast days observed in the Hispanic and Pueblo villages, as well as Chamber of Commerce and New Mexico Tourist Bureau pamphlets. The importance of the calendar and diagram of the annual round is that it can be used during community interviews to elicit information about the practices and locations which might involve traditional cultural properties.

The diagram is a visual representation of community process, but it is important to remember that the details of how any community observes traditions may vary from year to year. Some traditions are "moveable," not specifically fixed by date or community obligation. Depending upon local social and economic conditions, there may even be some years when communities choose to forego public observances. How do you know who to ask for information? Who is going to want to tell all of this to a new kid in town?

Identifying Community Consultants

Interviewing requires special skills and patience. This is especially true when it comes to traditional cultural properties, since participants may be prohibited from discussing the rituals of their communities with outsiders. In New Mexico communities we have also found that the transgressions of past researchers can make it difficult to find acceptance in a community. The community's memory of the mistakes of your predecessor may still be vivid decades later. We are often told stories about Matilde Coxe Stevenson, Elsie Clews Parsons, and Evan Vogt that have a profound immediacy, which is surprising, to say the least, since it has been 50 to 100 years since these researchers worked in New Mexico—a mere wink of an eye in a traditional way of reckoning time. Community consultants need time to assess your behavior, to determine whether they are placing themselves in jeopardy with their community by cooperating with you.

In American Indian communities, particularly in the northern Rio Grande pueblos, the tribal council usually directs researchers to community leaders and representatives authorized to speak with government

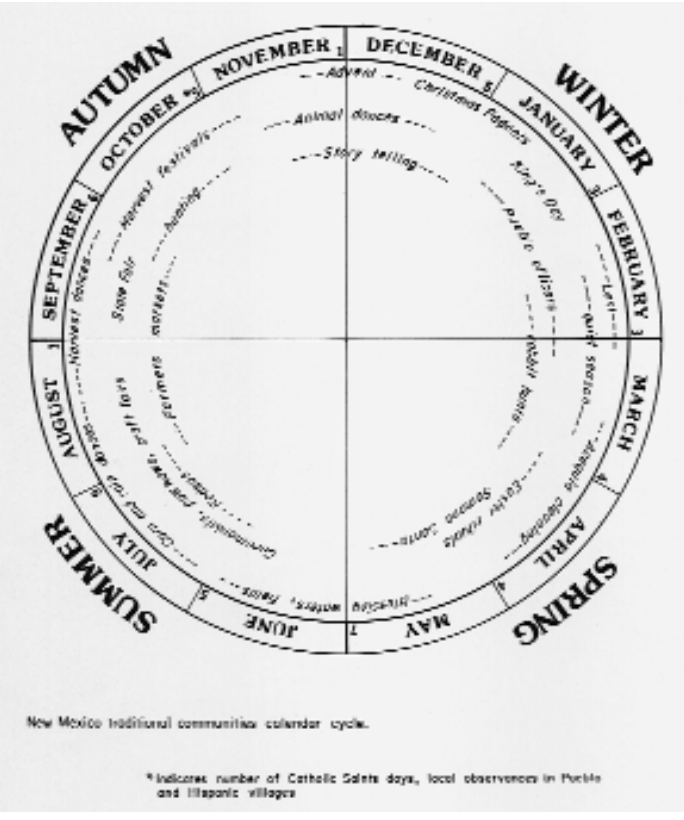

Fig. 1. Calendar Cycle for Traditional Communities in New Mexico.

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agencies and outsiders. We recognize that many times the political leaders of American Indian communities are not necessarily the sanctioned traditional leaders. While tribal planners and tribal officers may not be the only people you will want to speak to in a community, they are usually familiar with the tools and language of historic preservation.

In other traditional communities there may be no readily identifiable speakers on traditional matters, and there may be no one who is familiar with the workings of historic preservation planning and compliance. In non-Indian communities a village government, a County Commission, or other elected officials may be able to direct you to the traditional leaders in the community, but we would not rely solely on the political bodies for community consultation. There may be many interests and points of view on a project that influence what a person may tell you as an elected official and what he may say as a private individual.

Absent a community body that speaks for the traditions of the community, it is important to devise a specific plan to elicit information from a range of people whose customs and traditions may be affected by your project. There are usually a number of groups whose points of view represent the range of community traditions and community concerns. Once again we use modeling techniques, that is visual representations and verbal classifications of the community, to identify those groups that might be consulted or interviewed.

Below are some examples of the community interest groups that we identified for the Pecos project. The seven groups that we defined represent a stratified and, we believe, a representative sample of the community's interests. Since our interest in the Pecos project has a larger ethnographic focus than the identification of traditional cultural properties, the groups were identified to sample a broad cross-section of community members who may wish to voice a concern about the impact of NPS policies on their community.

1. Adjacent Landowners--these are people whose lands adjoin the park. Their concerns have largely to do with the impact of park operations on the long-term value and use of their own lands.

Religious processions are an important part of feast day observances. in this photo residents of Tecolote, NM carry the image of their patron saint, Our Lady of Sorrows. Photo by Nancy Hunter Warren.

2. Schools--teachers and students in local schools might have an interest in the ways in which they can use the park for the study of local history. In our experience, junior high and high school history teachers are often familiar with the local ceremonial calendar of their communities and with key participants. They may serve well as guides to the community. They can certainly alert you to the local etiquette, essential to working in the community.
3. Local Businesses--these are people who own or operate local businesses, who may see their enterprises helped or hindered by park operations. Some of the local businesses impacted by the park might includes the grocery stores and gas stations, restaurants, and R.V. and campground owners.
4. Local Historians / Preservationists--local preservation groups, historical societies and environmental groups often serve as advocates of the preservation of natural or cultural resources of importance to the community. They may be the people in the community who are most comfortable talking to outsiders about the cultural requirements of the community.
5. Political Bodies--the village trustees and the county commissioners may have official positions that reflect local concerns. In the Pecos area, the county commission has passed an ordinance that calls for the preservation of "customs and traditions." The ordinance is aimed at protecting the established economy, but it will be important to interview the commissioners to determine if they intend to use the ordinance to protect cultural practices as well.
6. Cultural Brokers--this is an important group of people who have ties to the community but who live outside the community. They may assist researchers by shedding light on local alliances and issues that affect the current political and social climate in the community but that people living in the community may not readily discuss with an outsider.
7. Traditional Community Leaders--many traditional cultural properties are maintained by persons holding special positions in the community. They are in many cases the keepers of the ritual artifacts or are recognized by the community for their cultural knowledge. In some cases, the positions may be hereditary.

   Obviously, traditional community leaders may have the most knowledge about the traditional cultural properties that you are interested in documenting. In New Mexico communities, the *mayordomo* of the church is often responsible for housing the ritual artifacts used in community celebrations. This position may be held, as a matter of convenience, by the family living nearest the church. In another example relating to the church, the priest may be the most knowledgeable person to talk to about the liturgy, but not the best person to talk to about the importance of a traditional property to the community. Likewise, the *mayordomo* of the irrigation system is the record keeper as well as the person responsible for the maintenance of the system. The person who occupies this position may, however, not be a person with extensive historical or cultural knowledge about the ditch system. [12]

It does not necessarily follow, then, that the person who keeps the physical records or objects of the rituals will be the same person who has the authority to speak about the cultural importance of the events. You may conduct many interviews before you find the person who can help you understand where and what the traditional cultural properties important to the community are.

Recording Traditional Cultural Properties

Identifying knowledgeable people in the community is just the beginning of the process of documenting tradi-

tional cultural properties. Conducting successful interviews—that is, interviews in which you obtain the information you need to record the significance of the property while respecting community sensibilities—is an involved process. Your interviews themselves may be at odds with the culturally prescribed behavior of the community. Learning to ask questions—learning to communicate in a discourse style that is culturally sensitive, and yet yields the information needed to meet the requirements of your project—is as individual as the community in which you are working.[13]

In our experience, genuine collaboration between the field researcher and participants in the traditional practice assures greater success in appropriately recording a traditional cultural property. When the documentation of the property can be shown to benefit the community, and when recording procedures are compatible with the etiquette of the traditional community, it is much more likely that the practitioners will be active participants in the documentation process. The more closely your goal for recording a traditional property corresponds to the community's need for site protection and the preservation of cultural information, the greater the chance that the documentation process will be acceptable to the community.

In the past, anthropologists and archeologists assumed that they were writing for an audience of professional peers. Now, we must never forget that what we write about a community will be read by members of that community. Contract reports and publications may also be used by others whose purposes differ markedly from those under which the research was performed. Traditional communities must have a voice in deciding what information is disclosed about their community and their cultural practices. The community may even request ultimate control over the information recorded and the disposition of that information.

Issues of confidentiality arose early in the Pecos project. We made specific agreements with the participating communities to protect the identity and anonymity of persons interviewed. We agreed to abide by any voiced restrictions to ensure that culturally sensitive material would not be included in any NPS or professional publications. We also agreed to give the participating communities copies of research materials that we located throughout the process. We have tried to make this a truly collaborative process in which we share in the repatriation of cultural information, and the community has a strong voice in how that information is used in the future.

It is clear that the process of documenting traditional cultural properties is changing the conduct of anthropological research. It is also changing the relationship between traditional peoples and anthropological professionals. It is a process in which traditional peoples are active participants, changing the way in which their communities are recorded and their history is told.[14]

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Notes

1 In some cases, communities may have events and rituals that do not meet the TCP criteria, but which are vital to the cultural identity of the community. Project managers need to be attuned to those community practices that may not meet the strict criteria of eligibility to the National Register, but which may need to be considered in light of broader public policy concerns for the human environment that can be raised under the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA].

2 National Register Bulletin 38, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties," pp. 1.

3 In New Mexico cultural survival is a topic of importance for social action and scholarly pursuit. See for example, Paul Kutsche, editor, "The Survival of Spanish American Villages," *The Colorado College Studies, No. 15* (Colorado Springs: The Research Committee, The Colorado College, 1979) and Sylvia Rodriguez "Land, Water, and Ethnic Identity in Taos," in Charles L. Briggs and John Van Ness's edited edition, *Land, Water and Culture; New Perspectives on Hispanic Land Grants,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

4 National Register Bulletin, No. 38, pp. 15-16.

5 See for example, Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition: Genuine or Spurious," Journal of American Folklore 97:385:273-290, 1984.

6 Conformity and innovation are themes that are discussed in the anthropological literature of culture change. Many anthropological text books examine theses forces that are at play in traditional communities. See for example, Philip K. Bock, *Modern Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction,* (New York: Knopf, 1974), pp. 202-235, for a review of the anthropological literature on stability and change in traditional cultures.

7 Terms used to denote the ethnic composition of New Mexico communities are the subject of considerable debate. Adrian Bustamante recently examined the range of terms used throughout New Mexico's colonial history in "'The Matter Was Never Resolved': The *Casta* System in Colonial New Mexico, 1693-1823." *New Mexico Historical Review* 66:(2):142-163, 1991. Bustamante's unpublished doctoral dissertation examines the contemporary issue of ethnic classifications in New Mexico.

8 The literature addressing land tenure and land use in New Mexico's traditional communities is voluminous. Charles L. Briggs and John Van Ness's edited edition, *Land, Water and Culture; New Perspectives on Hispanic Land Grants,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987) provides an excellent review of historical and contemporary issues relating to land as the basis for preservation of traditional values in New Mexico. An earlier examination of land and traditions is Olen E. Leonard, *The Role of the Land Grant in the Social Organization and Social Process of A Spanish-American Village in New Mexico,* (Albuquerque: Calvin Horn Publishers, 1970).

9 For most archeologists mapping is a standard technique for recording archeological sites. Those skills are equally important in recording the cultural context of a TCP. Some guidance on mapping cultural landscapes can be found in Julia G. Crane and Michael V. Angrosino, *Field Projects in Anthropology: A Student Handbook* (Morristown: General Learning Press, 1974); David Meinig, editor, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

10 Modeling techniques are widely used by cultural anthropologists to diagram their understandings of belief systems of the communities in which they are working. Modeling techniques might be used to illustrate the social organization of a community, or at a more cognitive level to illustrate the symbolism in a cultural landscape. For examples of the use of models in

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Success depends on negotiating skills, the character of the case, and luck. Or perhaps—who knows?—on the power of the place.

When Pat Parker and I were drafting National Register Bulletin 38, I remember a conversation in which one of us said: "Boy, this is either going to drive people absolutely crazy, or stimulate some really good thinking."

The first proposition has been repeatedly verified over the years. It is a pleasure, reviewing the papers included in this issue, to see the second coming true as well. There is a great deal about how to handle traditional cultural properties that remains to be figured out, but the papers in this issue are evidence that intelligent people, from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, are working diligently and in good faith to do just that.

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anthropology, see Daniel R. Gross, *Discovering Anthropology*, (Mountainview: Mayfield Publishing, 1992), pp. 68-71.

[11] An annual Catholic Ritual Calendar is published each year by the Archdiocese of Chicago. The calendar is available through Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101. It is a fascinating "emic" view of the ritual cycle of the church and the instructions for community and individual behavior throughout the year.

[12] Stanley Crawford, author of a eloquent chronicle of his year as *mayordomo* of a northern New Mexico ditch, clearly recognized that he was chosen to be the ditch boss precisely because he had not been in the community long enough to have kinship ties, or other social obligations, that might interfere with his ability to collect annual fees from delinquent members. See, Crawford's *Mayordomo; Chronicle of a Northern New Mexico Acequia.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

[13] Charles L. Briggs, Learning how to ask; A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research, *Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language, No. 1.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), examines the complex social relationship and communicative processes that underlie interviews in cross-cultural social science research.

[14] The publication of traditional histories based on archeology, oral traditions and oral history is becoming more common in American Indian communities, black communities and Hispanic communities. See for example, Kurt Dongoske, Leigh Jenkins and T.J. Ferguson, "Understanding the Past Through Hopi Oral History," *Native Peoples: The Arts and Lifeways*, pp. 24-31 (Winter, 1993).

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